

## EMPLOYMENT

## Federal Student Career Experience Program

## APPROVAL/TRANSMITTAL

This is a new issuance to provide policy and procedure for the employment of students under the Federal Student Career Experience Program, which is a component of the Student Educational Employment Program.

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ROGER C. VIADERO  
Inspector General

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A. BACKGROUND. The Student Career Experience Program (SCEP) is a planned, progressive educational program that provides for the integration of a student's academic studies and Federal work experiences with the potential for noncompetitive conversion into the Federal career service. The objectives of the program are to: (1) build a better understanding among students and college personnel of Federal job opportunities; (2) bring about a stronger relationship between academic preparation and Office of Inspector General (OIG) needs; (3) support equal employment opportunities; and (4) strengthen Federal career service by conversion of persons who are immediately productive because of planned coordination of their education with progressive and increasingly responsible work experience.

B. AUTHORITY. 5 CFR § 213.3202(b) Employment Program - Student Career Experience Program.

C. DEFINITIONS

1. Student. An individual who is enrolled or accepted for enrollment as a degree-, diploma-, or certificate-seeking student and is taking at least a half-time academic course load in an accredited educational institution. The definition of half-time is the definition provided by the school in which the student is enrolled or accepted for enrollment.

2. Educational Institution. An accredited high school, technical or vocational school, 2-year or 4-year college or university, or graduate or professional school.
3. Target Position. Career position in OIG for which the student is training. Any OIG career position may be a target position for purposes of this program.
4. Working Agreement. An agreement between OIG, the school, and the student detailing the elements of a student's work experience plan. A Working Agreement is REQUIRED for EACH student and must be signed by the student and designated representatives of OIG and the educational institution. The Working Agreement is included as exhibit A of this manual section.
5. Work Period. Period during which student reports to OIG for work.
6. Academic/Study Period. Period during which student attends classes.
7. Schedule. Describes a student's overall plan for combining work and study.
8. Break in Program. A break in program is defined as a period of time when students are neither attending class nor working.

#### D. PROCEDURES

Each OIG Regional Inspector General (RIG) or Special-Agent-in-Charge (SAC) will identify a liaison officer to identify colleges in their region and keep them advised of potential student employment opportunities. For headquarters, the liaison officer will be the OIG Student Employment (SEP) Coordinator, Human Resources Management Division (HRMD), OIG. The liaison officer will serve as the primary contact with the school in developing, facilitating, and monitoring student work experience assignments and working agreements. To participate in this program, students must meet all eligibility criteria and receive a certification of eligibility by their school. Students will be tentatively selected by the RIG or SAC, or in headquarters, by the Division Director (DD) or Staff Head (SH). Prior to appointment, an eligibility and qualification determination will be made by the SEP Coordinator.

Once on board, a student's continued participation in the program will be contingent upon the factors detailed in paragraph K, below. A minimum of 640 work hours (which is equivalent to 16 weeks or approximately one academic semester) of career related work must be completed prior to completion of or concurrently with completion of course requirements for conferring a diploma, certificate, or degree. Upon successful completion of the program, the student MAY be noncompetitively

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converted to a career conditional appointment in the Federal service within 120 days of completion of course requirements. At the end of 120 days, students who have not been converted will be separated from appointment under this authority. **Participation in this program does not entitle a student to employment with OIG after graduation.** However, it is the goal of OIG and the program to train students and place them in their target positions. Therefore, it is the policy of OIG that students will be kept fully informed as to their employment and promotion potential.

E. STUDENT ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible for this program in OIG, the student must:

1. Be at least 16 years old;
2. be a U.S. citizen or a noncitizen who is lawfully admitted to the U.S. as a permanent resident or otherwise authorized to be employed;
3. be a degree-seeking student enrolled at least half-time in an academic major related to or required by the target position, and be making reasonable progress towards attainment of that degree, diploma, or certificate;
4. meet security and fitness requirements for the position; and
5. have no direct reporting relationship with his/her relative nor be in a position in which the relative could influence or control the student's appointment, employment, promotion, or advancement within the agency.

There is no requirement for students to meet any economic or income criteria to be eligible for this program. Relatives may not advocate the employment, promotion, or advancement of students.

F. SELECTION

OIG will select students for this program:

1. Without regard to race, color, religion, national origin, disability, age, gender, political beliefs, or sexual orientation;
2. who have met the above eligibility criteria (see paragraph E, above); and

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3. who meet eligibility requirements for participation in the program set by their educational institution.

G. ENTRY ON DUTY

To commence participation in this program,

1. The student must submit to the OIG SEP Coordinator an application package consisting of:

- a. A resume or OF-612;
- b. an official transcript;
- c. a written certification of eligibility from his/her school; and
- d. any other documentation required by the position.

The package will be forwarded to the Director, HRMD.

2. The SEP Coordinator, will determine the student's eligibility and qualifications for the program and set the appropriate grade-level, pay, and benefits based on Federal regulations.

3. Any work experience related to the student's career goals and gained on a Student Temporary Appointment may be credited towards the 640 hours of work experience necessary for noncompetitive conversion.

4. A Working Agreement must be co-signed by the student, a representative from his/her educational institution, the RIG, SAC, DD, or SH, and the SEP Coordinator.

The Working Agreement MUST include:

- a. The nature of the work assignments or position description;
- b. the schedule of class attendance;
- c. evaluation procedures; and
- d. requirements for continuation and successful completion of the program.

## H. PAY AND BENEFITS

1. The Federal General Schedule grade and pay for which the student is qualified will be determined by the OIG SEP Coordinator in accordance with Federal standards and pay schedules. This determination will be noted in the student's Working Agreement.
2. During work periods, the student will accrue and receive annual, sick, and holiday leave in accordance with Federal regulation.
3. Students who qualify will receive a special pay rate based on the series of position and geographical location of the position.
4. When the student is appointed to the SCEP, he/she will be enrolled in the Federal Employees Retirement System.
5. The student may also elect to participate in the following Federal benefit programs:
  - a. Federal Employees Group Life Insurance (FEGLI);
  - b. Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB); and
  - c. Thrift Savings Plan (TSP)

NOTE: The Government's contribution to the cost of FEHB is pro-rated based upon work schedule. Therefore, part-time employees will pay more than full-time employees for health benefits.

6. The student will be reimbursed by OIG for costs related to official travel and duties in accordance with OIG policy and procedures.

## I. WORK SCHEDULES

At the agreement of all parties to the Working Agreement, work schedules may be arranged parallel to class schedules (e.g., the student may both work and attend class during the pay period), may include breaks in academic schedule (including holiday, spring, or summer breaks), or may be arranged to allow the student to alternately attend class and work (e.g. attend class in the fall semester, work in the spring semester, attend summer school, etc.). The student is carried in leave without pay (LWOP) status during nonwork periods.

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OIG, in concert with the school and the student, will design the student's work schedule to:

1. Be consistent with the student's academic studies or career goals;
2. not interfere with academic schedules or class attendance; and
3. allow the student to meet academic and qualification requirements for successful completion of the program prior to or concurrently with completion of course requirements.

There are no limitations on the number of hours a student can work per week, but the student's work schedule should not interfere with the student's academic schedule.

Generally, it is expected that students will be working in OIG, be enrolled in classes, or both. However, OIG may use its discretion in either approving or denying a "break in program" (see paragraph C for definition of "break in program") during which the student would be carried in LWOP status. The best interests of the student and OIG must be balanced in making these decisions.

**To be eligible for conversion to a permanent position, a student must complete a minimum of 640 work hours prior to or concurrently with completion of course requirements for conferring a degree, diploma, or certificate. Time worked after completion of course requirements does not count towards completion of the 640 work hours. A student may work more than 640 hours during the duration of the program.**

J. APPOINTMENT AUTHORITY

Appointments under the SCEP are made under Schedule B, 5 CFR Chapter 1, § 213.3202(b), for a period not to exceed 120 calendar days after completion of course requirements for conferring a diploma, certificate, or degree. All laws and policies governing equal employment in the Federal service and OIG apply to these appointments.

**K. ONGOING PROGRAM PARTICIPATION****1. Student**

To remain eligible for continued participation in the SCEP, the student must:

- a. Remain continuously enrolled in his/her educational program and make reasonable progress toward his/her degree, diploma, or certificate;
- b. remain declared in an academic major that is related to or required by the target position;
- c. perform at the Fully Successful level or higher. Although the student will be given the opportunity to improve his/her performance, the student will be separated from OIG if performance drops below this level and does not improve;
- d. notify OIG and the educational institution of changes in academic or employment status; and
- e. provide transcripts and proof of enrollment to the SCEP Coordinator on an annual basis.

**2. The OIG supervisor must:**

- a. Orient the student to OIG's mission, policies, and procedures;
- b. provide quality and progressive work assignments related to the student's academic studies or career goals where he/she can learn and be productive and which prepare the student for the target position;
- c. establish performance standards and rate the student's work in accordance with agency policy and in conformance with paragraph L, below;
- d. notify the school of any change in the student's employment status; and
- e. initiate all personnel actions and keep necessary records related to student employment.

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3. **The Regional Administrative Officer must:**

a. Prepare and submit an SF-52, Request for Personnel Action, each time the student:

- (1) reports to OIG to begin a work period, and
- (2) leaves OIG to begin a nonwork period.

The student is carried in LWOP status during nonwork periods.

b. Submit all SF-52's and student performance appraisals to HRMD for processing and inclusion in the student's official personnel folder.

4. **HRMD will:**

- a. Process all personnel actions, and
- b. keep necessary records related to student employment.

L. **PERFORMANCE APPRAISALS**

A performance appraisal must be completed at the end of each work period, and annually if the student is continuously employed. The supervisor must discuss the appraisal with the student, providing as much guidance as possible to help the student understand his or her professional strengths as well as those areas where progress and/or improvement is needed.

If the student's performance falls below the Fully Successful level, the supervisor will discuss this with him/her and describe those areas where improvement is needed. The student will be given the opportunity to improve. However, failure to improve after sufficient opportunity is provided will result in termination from the program.

Students who are preference eligibles who have completed 1 year of current continuous service in the same or similar position(s) are entitled to the procedural rights pursuant to 5 CFR Part 432, and have the right to appeal to the Merit Systems Protection Board (5 CFR § 432.106). Nonpreference eligible students who have completed 1 year of current continuous employment in the same or similar position(s) are entitled to the procedural rights, excluding appeal rights.

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As outlined in the Working Agreement, the school and OIG, through the appointed Liaison Officer, must keep each other timely apprised of any changes in the student's academic or employment status or progress. Both academic and employment performance reports must be shared between OIG and the school. The Liaison Officer is responsible for ensuring that a copy of each performance appraisal is forwarded to the school contact. The Regional Administrative Officer is responsible for forwarding copies of the student's performance appraisal to HRMD.

**The final appraisal will include a recommendation regarding conversion.**

If not recommending the student for conversion, the supervisor must discuss the reasons for his/her decision with the student. All such decisions must be coordinated with HRMD since failure to recommend conversion will result in termination of the student from the program.

M. PROMOTIONS

Students may be promoted up to the GS-9 level if they meet the qualification requirements and justify advancement based on performance during work and study periods. Students should be advised of factors affecting promotions or failure on their part to meet necessary requirements.

Students will receive within-grade increases as they become eligible, in accordance with Federal regulation.

N. TERMINATION FROM THE PROGRAM

A SCEP appointment may be terminated at any time for any of the following reasons:

1. Resignation;
2. change in curriculum which will not qualify student for target position;
3. suspension, expulsion, or withdrawal from school;
4. failure to meet fitness requirements (when applicable);

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5. inability of OIG to maintain employment of student for administrative reasons. (Students are covered by Federal Reduction in Force rules if they have not completed their program);

NOTE: Separations for these reasons (paragraphs N1 - N5) provide no right of appeal and do not require OIG to follow procedures in 5 CFR part 432 or part 752.

6. failure to make reasonable progress towards attainment of a degree, diploma or certificate;

7. poor performance, as described in paragraph L, above; or

8. unacceptable conduct.

Students who are preference eligibles and have completed 1 year of current continuous service in the same or similar position(s) are entitled to the procedural rights required by part 432 (unacceptable performance) or part 752 (misconduct) of 5 CFR and may appeal to the Merit Systems Protection Board. Non-preference eligible students who have completed a year of current continuous service in the same or similar position(s) are entitled to the procedural rights of 5 CFR part 432 excluding appeal rights .

Students disqualified prior to completion of the program and those not recommended for conversion must be terminated and may only be reappointed through competitive process.

Students cannot be reassigned noncompetitively to positions outside of the Student Educational Employment Program.

Students who have not been converted by the end of the 120 days after completion of their educational requirements will be separated from employment under the Student Career Employment Program.

O. CONVERSION TO PERMANENT APPOINTMENT

Within 120 calendar days after the student's completion of his/her educational requirements for a diploma, certificate, or degree, OIG will determine whether or not to convert the student noncompetitively to a career conditional appointment as an OIG employee.

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Conversion to a permanent appointment is subject to the availability of a permanent, full-time funded position at either the student's work site or another OIG location. **Neither the student nor OIG is committed to a permanent appointment by virtue of participation in SCEP.**

Pursuant to 5 CFR 1201, **nonconversion is not appealable to the Merit System Protection Board.**

To be converted, the student MUST:

1. Be a U.S. citizen;
2. have satisfactorily completed all academic requirements for his/her diploma, certificate or degree;
3. have completed 640 work hours prior to completion of or concurrently with completion of course requirements;
4. have received a Fully Successful performance appraisal within 120 calendar days;
5. meet all qualification standards for the target position; and
6. meet all security and fitness requirements of the target position.

If OIG cannot convert the student into the permanent work force or cannot convert at the grade for which the student is eligible, the student should be advised to seek eligibility through the competitive process. However, this does not extend the time limit for conversion beyond the 120th calendar day after completion of course requirements.

**Nonconversion of a student to a permanent appointment must be coordinated with HRMD at least 90 days in advance of termination.**

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## **STUDENT CAREER EXPERIENCE PROGRAM WORKING AGREEMENT**

**between**

**The U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of Inspector General  
and**

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**(educational institution)**

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**(student)**

This agreement is the basis for developing mutual understanding and respective responsibilities between the U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of Inspector General (USDA/OIG),  
\_\_\_\_\_ (educational institution) and  
\_\_\_\_\_ (student) in the student's employment under the Federal Student Career Experience Program (SCEP). SCEP is a planned, progressive educational program that provides for the integration of a student's academic studies and Federal work experiences with the potential for noncompetitive conversion into the Federal career service. This agreement is consistent with guidance contained in 5 CFR § 213.3202(b), and OIG.

### **A. STUDENT ELIGIBILITY**

**To be eligible for this program in OIG, the student must:**

1. Be at least 16 years old;
2. be a U.S. citizen or a noncitizen who is admitted to the U.S. as a permanent resident or otherwise authorized to be employed;
3. be a degree-seeking student enrolled at least half-time in an academic major related to or required by the target position and be making reasonable progress towards attainment of a degree, diploma, or certificate;
4. have no direct reporting relationship with his/her relative; and
5. meet security and fitness requirements for the target position (when applicable).

There is no requirement for students to meet any economic or income criteria to be eligible for this program.

**B. SELECTION**

OIG will select students for this program:

1. Without regard to race, color, religion, national origin, disability, age, gender, political beliefs, or sexual orientation;
2. who have met the above eligibility criteria; and
3. who meet eligibility requirements for participation in the program set by their educational institution.

**C. PAY AND BENEFITS**

1. The Federal General Schedule grade and pay for which the student is qualified will be determined by the OIG Student Employment Program (SEP) Coordinator in accordance with Federal standards and pay schedules. This determination is noted in this agreement.
2. During work periods, the student will accrue and receive annual, sick and holiday leave in accordance with Federal regulation.
3. Students who qualify will receive a special pay rate based upon the series of position and geographical location of the position.
4. Upon entry into the program, the student will be enrolled in the Federal Employees Retirement System.
5. The student may also elect to participate in the following Federal benefit programs:  
  
Federal Employees Group Life Insurance  
Federal Employees Health Benefits  
Thrift Savings Plan
6. The student will be reimbursed by OIG for costs related to official travel and duties in accordance with OIG policy and procedures.

**D. WORK SCHEDULES**

**A minimum of 640 work hours is required for successful completion of this program. These 640 hours must be completed prior to or concurrently with completion of course requirements for conferring a diploma, certificate, or degree.**

**OIG, in concert with the school and the student, will design the student's work schedule to:**

1. Be consistent with the student's academic studies or career goals;
2. not interfere with academic schedules or class attendance. At the agreement of all parties, work schedules may be arranged parallel to class schedules (work and attend class during the pay period); may include breaks in the academic schedule (including holiday, spring, or summer breaks); or may be arranged to allow the student to alternately attend class and work (e.g. attend class in fall semester, work during spring semester, etc.); and
3. allow the student to meet academic and qualification requirements for successful completion of the program prior to or concurrently with completion of course requirements for conferring a degree, diploma, or certificate.

**E. ONGOING PROGRAM PARTICIPATION**

**To remain eligible for continued participation in the Student Career Experience Program, the student agrees to the following.**

1. Remain continuously enrolled in his/her degree program and make reasonable progress toward his/her degree, diploma or certificate.
2. Remain declared in an academic major that is related to or required by the target position.
3. Perform at the Fully Successful level or higher. Although the student will be given the opportunity to improve his/her performance, the student will be separated from OIG employment if performance drops below this level and does not improve.
4. Provide transcripts and proof of enrollment to the SCEP Coordinator on an annual basis.
5. Notify OIG and the school of changes in academic or employment status.

**OIG agrees to do following.**

1. Orient the student to OIG's mission, policies, and procedures.
2. Initiate and process all personnel actions and keep necessary records related to student employment.

Exhibit A(4)  
of IG-3308

3. Provide quality and progressive work assignments related to the student's academic studies or career goals where he/she can learn and be productive and which prepare the student for the target position. Provide progressive and diversified work experiences to prepare the student for the target position.
4. Establish performance standards and rate the student's work in accordance with agency policy.
5. Conduct appraisals and counsel the student regarding his/her performance, complete necessary forms, and share progress reports with the school. Give the student opportunity to improve his/her performance, if the student's performance falls below the Fully Successful level.
6. Notify the school of any change in the student's employment status.

**The educational institution agrees to do the following.**

1. Ensure correlation of work and study in a manner that will expand the student's educational development.
2. Furnish OIG with requested information related to the student's field of study and academic progress.

**F. CONVERSION TO PERMANENT FEDERAL EMPLOYMENT**

Within 120 calendar days after the student's completion of his/her course requirements for a diploma, certificate or degree, OIG will determine whether or not to convert the student noncompetitively to a career conditional appointment as an OIG employee. **Participation in the SCEP does not guarantee permanent employment with OIG.**

**To be converted, the student MUST:**

1. Be a U.S. citizen;
2. have satisfactorily completed all academic requirements for his/her diploma, certificate, or degree;
3. have completed 640 work hours prior to completion of or concurrently with completion of course requirements;
4. have received a Fully Successful performance appraisal within 120 calendar days;
5. meet all qualification standards for that position; and
6. meet all qualifications, security, and fitness of the target position.

**G. GENERAL ADMINISTRATION**

The Chief, Employment Branch, Human Resources Management Division is OIG's Student Employment Program Coordinator.

Questions regarding the Student Career Experience Program may be directed to JoAnne Wilson, Personnel Management Specialist, at (202) 720-6997.

**I understand and agree to all of the above terms and conditions.**

**Educational Institution:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Type name and title) (Signature) (Date) \_\_\_\_\_

**Student:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Type name) (Signature) (Date) \_\_\_\_\_

**RIG/SAC/DD/SH:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Type name and title) (Signature) (Date) \_\_\_\_\_

**Chief**  
**Employment Branch** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Human Resources Management Division** (Signature) (Date)

Exhibit A(6)  
of IG-3308

**FEDERAL STUDENT CAREER EXPERIENCE PROGRAM  
WORKING AGREEMENT**

**between**

**The U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of Inspector General  
and**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**(educational institution)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**(student)**

**This Working Agreement is effected on \_\_\_\_\_ (DATE)**

**1. Address:**

**Telephone Number:**

**2. Trainee Position Covered:**

**3. Target Position:**

**4. Work Location:**

**5. Duties: See attached position description**

**6. Class/Work Schedule:**

**8. Starting Grade & Pay:** GS- \_\_\_\_\_ Pay: \_\_\_\_\_

Determined by:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Personnel Management Specialist  
Human Resources Management Division